

## Destination L1: A Thematic Unit

## Can We Talk?

### TEACHER GUIDE – LANGUAGE ARTS

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#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Communications is an important part of science. These language arts activities engage the students in both verbal and non-verbal communication. Students think about the variables that might affect whether something is communicated as intended. In “Alien Speak” students create an imaginary language. After using their simple language in a scenario, students discuss factors that impacted the effectiveness of using the new language.

Communication effects can be well illustrated by introducing distance into a conversation. The “Can We Talk?” activity is a common one, always fun, and is the best way to help students understand how messages can change in time and space. Non-verbal communication can impact a verbal communication effort. The best way for students to understand how this works is to give them an opportunity to experience distance activities—in this case, horizontal and vertical. A culminating discussion on the multitude of external effects that can impact communication is valuable. Environment is a big factor in communication, and one that students can relate to.



#### NATIONAL LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS ADDRESSED

(Source - *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education—3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*)

##### Grades 3-5

##### [Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes](#)

- Contributes to group discussions
- Listens to classmates and adults
- Makes basic oral presentations to class
- Uses a variety of nonverbal communication skills
- Uses a variety of verbal communication skills
- Interprets the use of nonverbal cues used in conversation

##### Grades 6-8

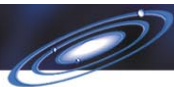
##### [Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes](#)

- Asks questions to seek elaboration and clarification of ideas
- Uses strategies to enhance listening comprehension
- Uses appropriate verbal and nonverbal techniques for oral presentations
- Evaluates strategies used by speakers in oral presentations
- Understands the ways in which language differs across a variety of social situations

##### Grades 9-12

##### [Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes](#)

- Asks questions as a way to broaden and enrich classroom discussions
- Uses a variety of strategies to enhance listening comprehension
- Adjusts message wording and delivery to particular audiences and for particular purposes
- Uses a variety of verbal and nonverbal techniques for presentations
- Understands influences on language use
- Understands how style and content of spoken language varies in different contexts
- Understands reasons for own reactions to spoken texts



(View a full text of the [Content Knowledge: 3rd Edition Standards](#).)

## MATERIALS

For each student:

### For Part One

- Student Activity, "[Alien Speak](#)"

### For Part Two

- Student Text, "[Capturing a Whisper](#)"

## PROCEDURE

### PART ONE

#### **“Op Eep Ork” Means “Bring a Friend” or Alien Speak**

1. Distribute the Student Activity, “Alien Speak,” to each student. Working in small groups of two or three, ask students to create an imaginary language. Ask them to think about how the vocabulary of that language sounds.
2. Ask students to either:
  - Give directions to the store.
  - Explain a process.
  - Explain a concept.
3. Give each group 10 minutes to develop a scenario. The goal here is a brief improvisation.
4. Ask each group to present their scenarios to the class using their imaginary language. Ask the class to interpret what each group is communicating.
5. Review each group’s observation notes following each presentation. What helped them to communicate effectively? What didn’t?
6. Hold a class discussion on how this activity impacts their earlier definition of communication. Are there any changes that they would now make to their definition?

### PART TWO

#### **“Can We Talk?”**

1. Have students read the Student Text, “Capturing a Whisper.” With students remaining in their seats, provide the student who is at one end of a row with a message written on a piece of paper. The message should be brief and have some detail. Examples of messages are:
  - Meet me at the corner of Brooks and Main at 8:30. I’ll be wearing a yellow jacket and a flowered hat.
  - Ask John to pick us up after the concert at the back door of the Metro-Plex. There will be four of us, all wearing red.
  - Go to the mayor’s office after school and pick up my key to the city. It will be at the front desk in a big manilla envelope with my name on it.
2. Provide the first person who begins the communication string with the message text in written form. Ask him or her to whisper it to the person next to them, and so on, around the room, until everyone has heard and repeated the message to the next student.
3. The last person conveys the message aloud to the class.

**Alternate Strategy Tip****Non-Verbal Communication Effects: Horizontal**

1. Ask students to pair up and to begin conversations while standing two feet apart. At one-minute intervals, ask students to take a small step forward (approximately six inches each time) until they are standing and conversing six inches apart.
2. After a minute of conversation at a six-inch distance, ask students to take their seats. Hold a class discussion on how the distances affected their comfort. Suggested responses may include eye contact, gestures, volume, topic of conversation, etc.
  - What effect did horizontal distance have on their conversation? How did distance influence the outcome of the conversation?
  - Ask students to read "A Final Important Note." Ask them to summarize this information in the Group Summary Sheet. Instruct students to write a paragraph about the benefits and limitations of this Excel spreadsheet as one plans a trip to the planets.

4. The first person reads the original message.
5. Compare messages, noting changes. Hold a class discussion on the reasons why there are changes.

**Alternate Strategy Tip****Non-verbal Communication Effects: Vertical**

Adult Supervision Recommended

1. With students in pairs, ask them to role-play a disagreement between a teacher and a student, a police officer and a driver, a wait person and a restaurant diner, or a similar situation. Ask students to begin the argument while seated across from one another.
2. After a minute has passed, ask the person playing the teacher or police officer to stand and continue the conversation while the other member remains seated.
3. After another minute, ask the person standing to stand on a stool while the other person remains seated.
4. Discuss and debrief the activity. Students who play the teacher or officer generally report that as their height increases, they become dominant. Students who remain seated generally respond that as their partner grows in height, they felt intimidated as the individual rises above them.
5. Discuss the effects of height on communication, and how non-verbal strategies can affect the outcome of a conversation. Ask students to provide illustrations where this is clearly a strategy to achieve an effect. (Courtroom seating, congressional hearings, worship services, organizational meetings, even classrooms!)

6. Use the following non-verbal communication effect strategies to involve students in thinking about importance of non-verbal communications in everyday life.



**Alternate Strategy Tip**  
**Non-verbal Communication Effects: External Effects**

- Ask students to choose one of the following environmental impactors and write a paragraph on how this factor can affect communication.
  - Room color
  - Room shape
  - Furniture style
  - Furniture location
  - Lighting
  - Temperature
  - Windows
  - Doors
  - Floor covering
- Ask students to share out with the class. It's a good idea to categorize their topics as they report so that the class can see varying perspectives and impacts on one topic (e.g., room color).
- Discuss the importance of creating a satisfactory communication environment in an area in which verbal communication is important, using the example of a classroom.
- Contrast that example with a movie theatre. Why are those two communication environments different?
- Ask students to continue in this discussion, offer additional contrasts in communication environments and the significance of each.